

Occupation during and after the War (Ottoman Empire)

By [Nur Bilge Criss](#)

Summary

Memories of occupation by foreign forces are not usually articulated except when prisoners of war speak of their experiences when debriefed. These are usually shameful episodes in the lives of those who survived. Collaboration with the enemy often overwhelms the saga of resistance, especially when examining World War I. Yet combined with the struggle to defy the “peace treaties”, Turkey was a unique example, however unexpected, of a country that reversed the partition plans of its heartland, not its defunct empire. This essay addresses the existential struggle of those Turks who defied the age-old Eastern Question and analyzes the conjunctures that made this success possible.

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Introduction

War endings in [historiography](#) are usually confined to conferences, peace treaties, border adjustments, reparations, regime change, and reborn and/or newly born polities. Stories of [occupation](#) and resistance, however, remain confined to obscure pamphlets and memoirs. Official but secret documents await declassification. Further, state-centric approaches alone do not provide satisfactory accounts of occupation or resistance. But they do offer the context within which individuals and groups operate and exert their political will against the odds and potentially bring about change when and where it is most unexpected. This is one such saga. In 1919 British Admiral [Richard Webb \(1870-1950\)](#), Deputy High Commissioner in occupied Istanbul, wrote to his friend Sir [Eyre Crowe \(1864-1925\)](#) in Paris, “The situation in the interior, due practically entirely to the Greek occupation of Smyrna, is getting more hazy and unsettled. Were this anywhere but Turkey, I should say we were on the eve of a

tremendous upheaval”.¹

The occupation of [Izmir \(Smyrna\)](#) on 15 May 1919 may have roused many a Turk from the lethargy that had accompanied defeat in the Great War, but was hardly the major reason for the “upheaval” that followed. The major shock had come with the occupation of Istanbul, capital of the [Ottoman Empire](#). Almost simultaneously with the occupation of the capital were occupations of vital provincial cities in the Anatolian heartland and its Mediterranean coast. During the war, the [Committee of Union and Progress](#) (CUP) government had made contingency plans in case of defeat and foreign occupation; withdraw to central Anatolia and continue to fight from that base. When the CUP leadership escaped the country in 1918 bearing both the burden of defeat and the 1915 [Armenian massacres](#), institutional and family networks maintained the resistance while a new leadership took over.²

This article addresses the following major questions. First, why was the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, Istanbul (Constantinople), occupied by the Allies soon after the [Mudros Armistice](#) of 30 October 1918 when no other capital city of the defeated powers was occupied? Secondly, how was it possible that French, British and Greek occupations of major cities in Anatolia (Italian occupation being of an entirely different nature) first met with local resistance and then an increasingly organized military resistance? Third, what were the diplomatic implications of rivalries between the Allied powers that made it possible for the underground resistance in Istanbul to divert the energies of its most vociferous intelligentsia, veterans of multiple wars, and war material to Anatolia? Last but not least: how was it possible that Turkey ended up being the only defeated power to reverse the dictated peace and determine its own political future?

The occupation of Anatolia during the war was the Russian occupation in the northeast and eastern Black Sea coast as of February 1916, namely Erzurum, Kars, Erzincan, Muş and Bitlis, the last three of which were taken back in July and August of 1916. In March and April 1916, the Black Sea towns Rize and Trabzon were occupied, after which the Russian armies made a semi-circular route towards occupying Van. The geographical configuration matched that of the secret [Sykes-Picot](#), alias the Asia Minor agreement of 1916, concluded with the Allies.

A large tract of territory was returned in the aftermath of the [Bolshevik revolution](#) when [Russia](#) unilaterally withdrew from war with the [Brest-Litovsk agreement](#) negotiated between December 1917 and March 1918. It was, however, not possible to keep the northwestern borders intact because Armenian militants who accompanied the Russian army remained to continue fighting and perform acts of ethnic cleansing. Moreover, in 1919 the Supreme Council of the [Paris Peace Conference](#) demanded the transfer of Kars, Sarıkamış, Ardahan and Iğdır to the Republic of [Armenia](#).

Subsequently, war with the Armenian Republic in 1920 settled the northeastern frontier in Caucasia.³ In 1921, diplomatic negotiations with [Georgia](#) resulted in the return of Ardahan and Iğdır to Turkey in exchange for Batumi. Apart from this geography, Arab provinces of the empire were lost to the British in war and are only referred to here in the context of an effort to establish a unified front against the British and French occupation in 1921, during the Arab resistance movements in Syria/Iraq. In essence, the Ottoman state, no longer financially or economically sovereign, was an empire in name only. Following the loss of its Balkan territories during the 19th century, [Egypt](#) was occupied by the British in 1881. Arab [nationalism](#)/intellectual awakening was already a fact before and during World War I, albeit confined to urban centers like Beirut, Damascus and Baghdad. Hence, Arab notables and intellectuals found willing allies with the British and French while Ottoman military governors attempted to suppress agents of Arab nationalism by harsh measures during the war. The war concomitant with mobilization, deaths, starvation and economic devastation had literally decimated Arab societies.⁴

By the time Ottoman armies withdrew from or surrendered in the Mesopotamian fronts secession of the Arab provinces was a foregone conclusion.⁵ This resonated in Turkey's National Oath, a manifesto in 1920 that areas with a majority Arab population would remain outside its borders. Therefore, foreign occupation of the Arab provinces, a topic which has its own historians is not part of this study. For the occupation of Ottoman Arab provinces and Egypt see the companion article "[Occupation during and after the War \(Middle East\)](#)".

This article primarily addresses Allied (British, French, Italian, Greek, U.S.⁶ and Japanese) occupation of Istanbul, which lasted from November 1918 to October 1923. The last two had a symbolic presence in Istanbul and were there more as observers than occupiers. Secondly, this article highlights the French, British, Greek and Italian occupation of provincial cities in the southeast, south and Aegean Anatolia. These practically lasted from 1918-1919 to 1922, and in some regions even shorter. Finally, the political-diplomatic vagaries which affected the occupiers as well as the occupied concludes with the end of occupation and the path to a negotiated peace conference on near eastern affairs in Lausanne between 1922-1923. The conclusions cover the main points of this period as well as political and social changes that ten years of war (1912-1922) brought to Turkey.

Besides the frequently mentioned patriotism or nationalist awakening, one must take into account the psychological dimensions of the trauma involving the loss of the core territories in the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans and the Arab provinces. The occupations that followed the armistice that ended WWI were embedded in the Eastern Question. Further, the

motivation to defend the last remaining homeland became an existential matter in addition to the leadership profiles, most of whom had been born in lost territories. The Allied forces of occupation assumed that there would not be serious resistance. Nonetheless, war weariness, rivalries, the [Red scare](#) and the priority of concluding peace in Europe were also factors that weakened the Allied position. The two-year period spanning from the beginning of occupation in 1918 to the Sèvres peace treaty imposed on the Ottoman government in 1920 provided ample time for resistance to foreign occupation to consolidate. A brief background on the factors that motivated the final resistance in a failed state follows.

The Ottoman Empire as a Failed State

The Ottoman Empire was unquestionably a failed state⁷ by the second half of the 19th century. It was bankrupt by 1875, its debts to European powers were governed by the Ottoman Public Debt Administration (*Caisse de la Dette Publique Ottomane*). Almost all state income went to finance debt. In 1881 came the International Tobacco Regime Company as an extension of the latter (the infamous *Reji*). The Ottoman state was forced to establish a 6,700-strong police force to prevent tobacco growers from smuggling their own crop. Armed conflict between this force, whose salaries were paid by the state, resulted in at least 50,000 deaths of the peasantry in the Aegean and western Black Sea coastal regions.

Added to financial failure were incessant wars and territorial loss: the 1877-1879 Russo-Ottoman war, whereby the latter lost all its Balkan territories except for [Macedonia](#); British occupation of Egypt in 1881; the brief Greek-Ottoman war of 1897; internecine guerrilla warfare against armed bands of various ethnic origins in Macedonia;⁸ the 1911-1912 Italo-Ottoman war over Libya (Cyneraica and Tripolitania); and the [Balkan Wars of 1912](#) on four fronts against a coalition of Serbs, Montenegrins, Greeks and Bulgarians. This war ended in a chaotic route of the Ottoman troops who had no contingencies for orderly retreat.⁹ The Bulgarian army would have occupied Istanbul had it not been for depletion caused by cholera and typhus. Of further significance for the proximate memory of belligerents in WWI as well as resistance fighters to occupation in its aftermath were the thousands of refugees, desperate survivors of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans who took shelter in Istanbul.¹⁰ Many sons of Rumelia (*Rumeli*, the Balkans in Turkish) were attending the Ottoman War Academy at the time or were already young officers. This experience contributed to their political socialization, along with the realization that there was no longer a home to which to return. One group was that of [Mustafa Kemal \(-1938\)](#), known as Atatürk, and his close friends from Salonica, ceded to [Greece](#) in 1912. They were to become the future leaders of independent Turkey.

The Eastern Question, basically how to divide the Ottoman territories between the Great Powers without inducing a European war since the late 18th century,¹¹ remained on paper until 1915.¹² The unexpected defeat of the Allies in the [Gallipoli wars](#) that year bought the Ottomans time until 1918 when there were fewer Great Powers left to carry out the mission of partition set out in the Eastern Question.

Occupation and Resistance in Istanbul

War-weary people on all sides welcomed the Mudros Armistice signed by the Ottomans and British on board the *HMS Agamemnon* on 30 October 1918. Although there was no stipulation in the agreement about occupation except in places where there was an imminent threat to Allied security, British troops began landing in the capital by 13 November 1918, soon to be followed by the French and other Allies. While neither Berlin, Vienna, Budapest or Sofia was occupied, why was Istanbul treated differently? In the short span between armistice and occupation, Lord [Nathaniel Curzon \(1859-1925\)](#), the British foreign secretary, decided on occupation and the Allies followed in tandem. Official reports do not reveal much, but a plausible analysis is found in Philip Mansel's book¹³ in the last chapter entitled "Death of a Capital City". According to Mansel, the overt reasons for occupation were [imperialism](#), revenge and anti-communism. Moreover, the Allies wanted to expedite disarmament and keep the partition of territories under strict control. London and Paris were out to prove that losses incurred during the fateful Gallipoli campaign were not for naught. Besides, the Allies needed space to deploy military equipment to extend logistical support to the White Russian armies fighting against the Bolsheviks in the civil war (but not successfully at that). Curzon even proposed a very old-fashioned solution for Istanbul, namely that it should be converted into a city-state and the sultan/caliph should move to Bursa or Konya.

Mansel stated that Curzon's actual aim was to break down the image of Istanbul as the seat of Islam in order to suppress the [Khilafat movement](#) among the Indian Muslims and sustain hegemony in [India](#). On 13 November 1918 an Ottoman official confronted the commander of the British troops who were disembarking and told him that this was against the rules of armistice. He was, however, taken aback when the British officer told him that Istanbul was designated as military headquarters.

By 1919 the Allied governance of Istanbul was organized with British, French, Italian, U.S., Greek and Japanese high commissioners as the top echelon, although the authority among them was distributed in the order cited. The Military Command of the Allied Forces of Occupation with its British president was responsible for passport control, special elements (civil police), inter-Allied tribunals and courts martial (1920) as well as prisons. The French

had one prison in Kumkapı and the British had five: Galata Tower, Arabian Han, Sansarian Han, Hotel Kroecker and Şahin Pasha Hotel. Under the high commissioners was the inter-Allied Commissions of Control and Organization, a Directing Committee of Generals that controlled sub-commissions such as disarmament, gendarmerie, censor, requisitions and saluting. Orders specified that only those residences that belonged to Muslims were to be requisitioned. The saluting commission, strange as it seems, had to enforce the rule that Turkish officers salute Allied soldiers regardless of rank but not expect to be saluted back. The latter stopped wearing uniforms in public.

The city was divided into zones of occupation: the Galata and Pera districts were under British responsibility, the old city and southwest under French, and Üsküdar (Scutari) on the Anatolian side was under Italian control. Top military command became problematic at first when General [George Milne \(1866-1948\)](#) was appointed as commander of the Army of the Black Sea and Admiral [Arthur G. Calthorpe \(1865-1937\)](#) was high commissioner in 1918-1919. Paris simultaneously sent General [Louis Franchet d'Espèrey \(1856-1942\)](#), commander in chief of the Allied Armies in the Orient, to assume military command of Istanbul. His position remained in flux until 16 March 1920, when London decided to re-occupy the city *de jure*. This was not the only action carried out under British auspices. From then on the numerous exchange of letters between London and Paris resulted in the removal of Franchet d'Espèrey and early in 1921, General [Charles Harington \(1872-1940\)](#) was assigned as commander in chief of the Allied Forces of Occupation, Constantinople.¹⁴ He remained in this position until Allied evacuation in October 1923.

Meanwhile, the [Ottoman government](#) changed numerous times depending on the collaborative actions of the Grand Viziers or the lack thereof. This was apparent in connection with the smuggling of military equipment from arsenals filled by disarmament. Governors who procrastinated to tighten control were removed, but even when collaborative viziers were in power, the smuggling of arms and men to Anatolia continued with ever growing underground forces of resistance. On the one hand, between 1920-1921 the Allies had their hands full with exerting control in a less than friendly environment (except for the majority of Istanbul Greeks and whomever they employed). On the other, they had to accommodate close to 200,000 White [Russian refugees](#) they helped evacuate from the Crimea upon Bolshevik victories in the Russian civil war. Among those were Bolshevik agents towards whom the Allies had to be vigilant. General Harington deported some people who were deemed to be Bolshevik agents. And by 1920, there was the Ankara government of the Turkish National Assembly which began to conduct a full scale resistance-turned-to-war against occupation.¹⁵

How the parliament in Ankara came about has to do with resistance to occupation, first by local militia, which evolved into organized groups, and then to a legal and legitimate parliament because of British conduct in Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire had been a parliamentary monarchy since 1908 and remained so until 1920. When the Allies decided to occupy Istanbul *de jure* in March 1920, they had no intention of closing down the parliament. However, there were a number of nationalist deputies in the parliament from Istanbul (who were also prominent members of the underground resistance) as well as from the provinces who had allegiance to the Association for Defence of the Legal Rights of Anatolia and Rumelia (*Anadolu-Rumeli Müdafa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*).

This association sprang from two congresses held in 1919 in Erzurum and Sivas respectively under the auspices of Mustafa Kemal Pasha¹⁶ and before long had women's chapters. Its authority extended to umbrella organizations for local resistance as seen in the next section. The next step that the association assumed was to promulgate a parliament in Ankara on 23 April 1920, which was ironically facilitated by British action. When British soldiers walked into the Ottoman parliament and arrested patriotic deputies who sponsored reading the National Oath (that the non-Arab regions populated by Muslim majorities were to remain sovereign) written in Ankara, the parliament closed down in protest. Soon after [Mehmed VI, Sultan of the Turks \(1861-1926\)](#) abrogated the non-existent parliament. The road was now open to the Association to declare that since the Istanbul government and Sultan were captives of the Allies, they had no say in national affairs and that the national assembly in Ankara was the only representative organ of the people. Nonetheless it would take another year until Ankara was recognized, first by [France](#) in 1921 with the Franklin Bouillon¹⁷ (Ankara) Treaty. A separate Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality was signed with Bolshevik Russia in 1921 that confirmed delineation of borders in northeast Anatolia, which included previous agreements with the Republics of Georgia and Armenia as their regimes were taken over by indigenous Bolsheviks.

Occupation and Resistance in Anatolia as Allies Part Ways

On 11 November 1918 an armistice was concluded to end WWI. Although armed forces were to halt where they were at the time, the rule did not apply to the Ottoman realm. British and French troops continued to move towards south-eastern Anatolia and the eastern Mediterranean coast, while Italian troops, albeit in smaller contingents, began occupation of previously designated zones. Few, if any in Turkey remembered the secret treaties among the Allies that partitioned the [Empire](#). Revealed by the Bolsheviks in 1917, partition plans spelled out in the Constantinople Treaty (1915), London (1915), Sykes-Picot (1916) and St.

Jean de Maurienne (1917) treaties were now being followed with the exception of the first, which had promised Constantinople to [Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia \(1868-1918\)](#). One will probably never know whether London was sincere about this promise or not, because the Bolshevik Revolution rendered that null and void when Russia unilaterally withdrew from the war in 1917-1918.

Article 9 of the London Treaty of 1915 read, "...in the event of total or partial partition [of the Ottoman Empire] in Asia, she [Italy] ought to obtain a just share of the Mediterranean region adjacent to the province of Adalia."¹⁸ The Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne reconciled conflicting interests of [France](#) and [Italy](#) in southwest Anatolia. Accordingly, France was awarded the Adana region and left the rest of the southwest to Italy, including the Vilayet (province) of Aydin with its regional capital Izmir (Smyrna). The Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France divided the Arab provinces of the Empire as respective zones of interest. Consequently, [Britain](#), France and Italy were abiding by the secret agreements that were to seal the Eastern Question.

Having lost the Arab provinces at war was one thing, but occupation in the heartland was another issue, deemed illegal and unjust by inhabitants. Before British and French mandates were spelled out at the Hythe Conference of 1920, British troops proceeded to occupy Mosul, Iskenderun (Alexandretta), Kilis, Antep, Maraş and Urfa in the southeast. Disarmament, arrests and deportation of local notables followed between late 1918 and 1919. Both the British and French were aided by resident or returning Armenians from the forced relocation of 1915. In January 1919, the French occupied Mersin, Osmaniye and Adana. They sent resident commanding Turkish officers to [prisoner of war](#) camps in Syria. Later in 1919, the British and French came to an understanding about zones of influence whereby the former delivered Kilis, Antep, Maraş, and Urfa to the French.

Inspired by the national defence organizations that reflected resolutions from the Erzurum and Sivas Congresses of 1919, the local people established regional defence organizations buttressed by officers assigned from Ankara in 1920. Consequently, war was renewed on the southern front of the independence war. The southern front theoretically extended to cover Palestine and Syria, and in 1921 a Turkish officer who was originally from the region with good contacts was sent there in the hope of joining with the Arabs in revolt against the British and French.¹⁹ But the plan failed plausibly because Arab nationalism had no room for the Turks. Maraş fought between 20 January and 20 February 1920; Urfa fought between 9 February and 11 April 1920; Antep fought between 1 April 1920 and 8 February 1921 before surrendering the city; Adana fought between 21 January 1920 and 20 October 1921.²⁰ That day also marks the Franklin-Bouillon Treaty signed in Ankara which conceded French defeat

and confirmed Paris' recognition of the Ankara government to the chagrin of the British. Although French troops from Cilicia (Adana region) were not withdrawn until 5 January 1922, the split between the Allied ranks was clear. From then on, French officers in the disarmament control missions throughout Anatolia began to fraternize with the Turkish military, invoking the British High Commissioner in Istanbul, Sir [Horace Rumbold \(1869-1941\)](#), to write in a personal letter that "the French are always playing the dirty on us."²¹

In essence, Italians were the first to cede from the Alliance, albeit subtly. When in 1919 the Greek Premier [Eleutherios Venizelos \(1864-1936\)](#) convinced the Supreme Council of the Paris Peace Conference that they should be allowed to occupy Izmir and was granted his wish, the Italians were disappointed because they were short-changed. Nonetheless, Italians occupied Antalya on 21 January 1919 and proceeded to claim Fethiye, Marmaris, Kuşadası, Bodrum, Milas and Konya, all of which today are known as tourist centres. They had all the trappings necessary, with occupation headquarters in Antalya, commanded by Colonel [Alessandro Ciano \(1871-1945\)](#) and High Commissioner Marquis [Eugenio Camillo Garroni \(1852-1935\)](#), the former Italian ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.²² Rome instructed its occupation troops not to use force or any coercion towards the people in their zones. The Italians seemed content when their occupation of the Dodecanese islands in 1912 was accorded permanency in the secret Treaty of St. Jean de Maurienne of 1917, and now that they linked their presence on the islands with southwestern lands of the Mediterranean. They had long been interested in Marmaris, not because of aesthetics but because it had one of the three bays in the eastern Mediterranean which was most suitable to use as a base for the navy (the other two were the bays of Iskenderun (Alexandretta) and Iskenderiye (Alexandria) of Egypt).

On 11 April 1922, a separate treaty on commercial concessions to Italy was signed between the Ottoman Minister of Foreign Affairs [Ahmed Izzet Pasha \(1864-1937\)](#) and Marquis Garroni. Whether Izzet Pasha, known to be clandestinely supportive of Ankara, did this to sustain peaceful Italian actions is not clear. Nonetheless, the Italians proved to be helpful to the national cause in more ways than one. First, they ignored when arms and men were smuggled through their zone in Üsküdar, on the Anatolian side of Istanbul. Secondly, they started selling arms, ammunition and clothing to the Turks, paid for by the Ottoman [Red Crescent](#). The director of the Ottoman Bank and deputy director of the Red Crescent, Berch Kerestegian, was instrumental in depositing money in the Banko di Roma, acquired by selling assets of the Red Crescent. Kerestegian was a friend of Mustafa Kemal from Salonica, so the network built between Ankara and Istanbul proved beneficial to the latter in terms of gathering intelligence, opening channels of informal diplomacy for Ankara's representatives, operating the underground resistance in Istanbul as well as buying military equipment from the commercially minded Italians.

Although there was a diplomatic war going on throughout, the Turkish war of independence is a military history which focuses on the Greek-Turkish war between 1919 and 1922. The Greek occupation of Izmir on 15 May 1919 met with protests and bloodshed in the city. The occupation was extended to Aydın, Manisa, Turgutlu, Ayvalık, and Tekirdağ (Rodosto) in Thrace. Greek military landings in Thrace were facilitated by British naval vessels, but as soon as the Greco-Turkish war began, London declared neutrality. In 1919, local armed bands displayed resistance to occupation using hit and run tactics. The Greeks did not remain within confines of the Milne Line, named after the British General George Milne who drew the lines of the occupation zone. As they began to expand towards the inner Aegean and then towards Ankara, war became imminent. At one point in early 1921, they reached the outskirts of the city and the Ankara parliament evacuated families and treasure to Konya.

However, the Greek army had moved too far from its logistical support base to its disadvantage. They were isolated in a proxy war on behalf of the British as well as for greater Greece. And, following setbacks received in 1921, another extremely bloody confrontation took place in July 1922 at the Battle of Sakarya that ended in a final Turkish offensive on 30 August 1922. Greek commanders were taken as prisoners of war, and remnants of the Greek army were practically chased towards Izmir. Much human drama accompanied the victory as the receding Greeks destroyed villages and towns on the way and the Greek population in Izmir desperately fought their way to get on board the naval and civilian vessels in the bay to escape to the Greek islands or to Greece proper. On 9 September 1922 the Turkish army entered Izmir. Greek historians were to call this venture the “disaster in Asia Minor”, which depleted the idea of a greater Greece as well as British policy.

It fell on the British to call for an armistice treaty. An armistice conference took place in Mudanya, a suburb of Bursa on the Marmara Sea between 3-11 October 1922. In attendance were the British General Harington, Turkish [İsmet İnönü \(1884-1973\)](#), French General [Georges Charpy \(1865-1945\)](#), Italian General [Ernesto Mombelli \(1867-1932\)](#). The Greeks refused to attend the meetings but signed the armistice treaty three days after it was concluded. The venue was now open to the call for a conference on near eastern affairs where the British were almost sure, though Lord Curzon had reservations,²³ that they could dictate their terms. The Lausanne negotiations and the final peace treaty proved otherwise.

Istanbul remained under occupation, but [Refet Bele Pasha \(1881-1963\)](#), known as Bele, arrived in 1922 to gradually take over the administration. Requisitioned homes were returned to their owners, customs control was taken over by Turks, Istanbul Greeks were required to either register as citizens or if not, obtain passports to remain as foreigners. Sultan Vahideddin found it prudent to leave the country on a British naval vessel and later settled in San Remo, Italy. On 1 November 1922 the Ankara parliament abrogated the sultanate. The

regime change from empire to republic officially followed on 29 October 1923 after Britain, France, Italy, [Japan](#), Greece, [Romania](#) and the Serb-Croat-Slovene state signed the Lausanne Treaty on 24 July 1923. Istanbul was evacuated during the first week of October 1923 and the Allied military commanders left on 6 October 1923 while Turkish troops entered the city.

Conclusion

The Eastern Question was not overtly on the agenda as far as the war aims of belligerents were concerned.²⁴ But the notion lurked behind in rhetoric and was operationalized on paper in the secret agreements of WWI, discussed previously. [Wilhelm II, German Emperor \(1859-1941\)](#) had welcomed the Balkan War of 1912, exclaiming “The Eastern Question must be resolved by blood and iron!”²⁵ The Greek Patriarch of Constantinople during the occupation stated in a letter sent to the Paris Peace Conference that the Eastern Question would never be solved until Constantinople was Greek again.²⁶ The original title of Fabio Grassi’s book *İtalya ve Türk Sorunu 1919-1923* was *L’Italia e la questione turca 1919-1923*, which reflects the problematique aptly. Copts, Maronites and Assyrians, peoples of the ancient eastern Christian denominations of the former Arab provinces of the Empire, accepted foreign occupation as liberation just like the Istanbul Greeks and, to a lesser extent, the Armenians did; a non-negligible dimension of *the Question* had been to protect the Christians of the Empire. In contrast, the leading Jewish Rabbi [Chaim Nahum Effendi \(1872-1960\)](#) spoke to the European occupiers in favour of Turks. By 1923, however, the Eastern Question was forced outside the borders of Turkey.

Domestic opponents of resistance to foreign occupation also abounded as observed from newspapers and diplomatic records. These people were to be labelled in the Republic “defeatist” and/or “collaborators”. On the one hand, opponents thought that resistance was pure adventurism like that of the CUP which led the country into WWI. On the other, the Palace thought that it may receive favourable peace conditions if cooperation with the occupiers was maintained. But the failed state once again failed to exert authority or control over resistance.

In 1918, Anatolia and part of Thrace were the last realms of the Ottoman Empire akin to contemporary borders. Scions of numerous refugees from the old borderlands in addition to those expelled from tsarist Russia (Tatars and Circassians) in the late 19th century, Muslim Greeks who arrived during the population exchange with Karaman Christians of Turkey in 1923-1924, as well as emigrants from the southern provinces are included in the human profile of the country. Along with them came cultural patterns and an intellectual outlook which facilitated adaptation to social and political change. This was most apparent in

women's public presence as individuals, professional and voluntary alike, a trend visible from the beginning of the 20th century's era of wars.²⁷ Occupations, as painful as they were both materially and mentally, stirred many Turks to come of age.

Nur Bilge Criss, Bilkent University

Notes

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